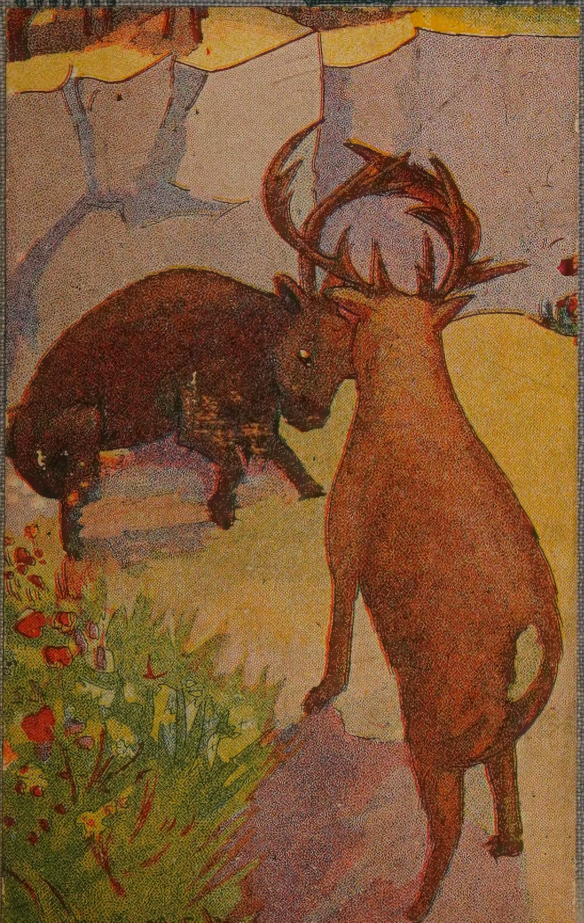
TWILIGHT ANIMAL SERIES

White Tail's Adventures

GEORGE·ETHELBERT·WALSH



Twilight Animal Series

White Tail's Adventures

By

George Ethelbert Walsh

Author of

"Bumper the White Rabbit"
"Bobby Gray Squirrel"
"Buster the Bear"
etc., etc.

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Twilight Animal Series

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By George Ethelbert Walsh

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Buster's Adventures
White Tail the Deer
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CONTENTS

Story		Page
I	White Tail Jumps Stepping Stone Brook	9
II	Father Buck's Failure	17
III	Young Black Buck's Challenge	25
IV	Father Buck's Decision	33
V	Young Black Buck's Challenge to a Race	41
VI	Downy the Woodpecker Brings Startling News	49
VII	A Race With Puma and Timber	57
VIII	Mrs. Puma and Timber Fight	65
IX	Young Black Buck Has An Accident	73
X	White Tail's Magnanimous Act	81
XI	White Tail's Adventure in the Camp	89
XII	White Tail Escapes	97
XIII	White Tail Hears Unpleasant News	105
XIV	Choosing a New Leader	113
XV	The Great Combat	121
XVI	White Tail Made Leader of the Herd	129

STORY I

White Tail Jumps Stepping Stone Brook

White Tail grew rapidly in size and strength, his long, clean limbs showing taut muscles and great springing power; and his neck grew thick and short, which is well for a buck, who must use it in savage thrusts when the head is a battering ram. His horns were short and bony, but they protruded in front like knobs against which it would be unpleasant to fall.

But his antlers were his pride. They spread out fan-shape on his head, crowning it with a glory that made Mother Deer supremely happy. At times it seemed as if the antlers were too heavy for the head and neck, but White Tail carried them easily, and when he shook them in sport or anger any one could see they were just fitted to him.

In time he stood as high as Father Buck, and a head taller than Mother Deer. The day the tip of his antlers reached an inch above Father Buck's, he felt a little thrill of pride.

To be as big and tall as his father had always been his ambition. But while it pleased Father Buck that his son was growing so big, it made him a little sad.

"You will soon be ready to take my place, White Tail," he said. "You're growing taller and stronger every day."

"That may be, Father Buck," he replied, "but it will be many a season before I can run as fast and far as you, or show the same strength in a fight. Oh, no, there's little chance of my equaling you for many, many seasons."

Father Buck merely smiled and nodded his head. "I want you to run out with me to Stepping Stone brook," he said simply. "There is something I want to show you."

White Tail was always eager for a run with Father Buck. Nearly every day they went off together to hunt and explore. Father Buck had been teaching him all the ways and tricks of the woods so that his education would be complete.

It was a cool, crisp day, and they ran through the woods, side by side, in long, gentle lopes until they came to Stepping Stone brook. This was a small stream confined between two ledges of rocks, with stones placed in it for stepping across when one didn't want

to wet the feet. Frequently the whole herd crossed it, using the stones so that not a foot touched the water.

When they reached the brook, White Tail immediately took a long drink of the cooling water, for their run had made him hot and thirsty. Father Buck watched him in silence, a very sad expression in his beautiful eyes. There was admiration also, but a little sadness.

"White Tail," he said suddenly, "I have brought you here to tell you something. Stepping Stone brook has always been the test for our leaders. Here it is that many a youngster has first earned his right to lead the herd, and, alas! many an older leader has broken his heart here."

White Tail looked up in surprise, and glanced from the speaker to the trickling waters. He was clearly puzzled by the words he had heard.

"No buck can be leader of the herd unless he can jump across Stepping Stone brook, clearing it from bank to bank without faltering or stumbling. If he fails he must wait until he can make the leap. Many, many have tried and failed, and others —"

White Tail's eyes gleamed with anticipa-

tion. He liked to take risks and attempt difficult tasks.

"I see," he said, laughing joyfully, "you brought me here to see if I could make the leap. Well, I can do it! I'll show you. I won't disappoint you, Father Buck."

"I know you won't, White Tail," was the reply. "I shouldn't have brought you here so soon if I thought you would fail. But I had another purpose, too."

"What is it?" asked White Tail.

"I will tell you later. Now I want to see you take the leap. Years ago, many, many seasons ago, I came here, and took it. There on the rocks you can see the marks of my leap. It was one of the longest ever made by any of our people. I was naturally proud of it. I shall never forget that day. I think it was the happiest of my life — except one."

"Which other one?" asked White Tail.

"The day I defeated Black Buck in the final struggle for leadership," was the reply. "It was a battle that lasted for hours, and all the herd watched us. We were down, and up again and again, struggling, fighting and bucking until it seemed as if both of us would die from exhaustion. But I finally won. I got him down on his knees, and then rolled him over, and stood there until he acknowl-

edged my leadership. That of course was the happiest day of my life."

White Tail thrilled at this story, and for a moment forgot the thing he was going to do until his father spoke again.

"Now let me see you take the brook in a jump."

White Tail trotted back on the embankment, but he discovered there was little room for a start. It was almost a standing leap. That was why it was so hard. Across on the other side the embankment shelved down gradually to the shore, with grass and moss covering the bold face of the rock.

"Take your time," Father Buck cautioned. "Measure the distance well, and do not spring unless you're sure of yourself. Many a buck that failed the first time never got his courage up to repeat it. It is the first leap that counts."

Reflecting long and earnestly on his father's words, White Tail measured the distance with his eyes, and then drew back as far as he could. He gathered his powerful hind legs together, squatted down on them, pawed the rock with his front ones, and stood a moment in trembling anticipation. His nostrils dilated, his eyes flashed. Then with a sudden forward spring he darted toward the edge of

the rock, and when he reached it his hind hoofs dug on the rock for a secure purchase. There was a momentary hesitation, as if he had decided not to make the attempt. Then his body shot upward and outward across the brook in the prettiest jump that any deer had ever taken.

He cleared the brook, with its stepping stones, passed the opposite edge, and landed all four hoofs firmly planted on the upper part of the slope. He had made the jump successfully.

Father Buck crossed the stream on the stones, and glanced down at his old mark. A spirit of exultation seized him.

"You have passed my old mark, White Tail, beaten it by a foot," he said. "You will some day be leader, I know."

White Tail was as much interested as his father in his triumph. He examined the marks, and then wanted to repeat the jump to see if he could better it.

"No," cautioned Father Buck, "once is sufficient. The second time may not be so good. You have established your mark. We will scratch it here with our hoofs as a challenge to all others. Let Young Black Buck beat it if he can. Until he does that is your mark."

White Tail accepted this order, and made

no further attempt to jump the brook. If Young Black Buck beats it some day then he would have a chance to try it again, and, if possible, score a longer jump.

"What was your other purpose in bringing me here today?" he asked remembering his father's words.

"Ah! That is the sad part of it," sighed Father Buck. "But you must know. I will show you."

Just what he meant will appear in the next story.

STORY II

Father Buck's Failure

Father Buck walked across the brook again, and took his place on the rock from which the jump was made. White Tail immediately concluded he was going to show him how much farther he could jump when he was a young buck.

"I know you will beat me," White Tail said. "But if you do, won't you give me another chance?"

"Yes, if such a miracle should happen," was the reply.

White Tail stood eagerly watching, while his father crouched as he had for the spring. How noble he looked with his big antlered head, with streaks of gray and white hair curling around the roots! White Tail was proud of him.

Suddenly Father Buck rushed forward, hesitated at the brink to get a good purchase with his hoofs, and then up in the air and straight

across his body shot. White Tail watched him with gleaming eyes.

Then something happened which startled him. The spring had not been as powerful as he thought, for instead of beating White Tail's mark, or reaching his own, Father Buck missed the shore by a foot. His hind legs actually splashed in the water.

"What happened?" exclaimed White Tail in amazement. "Did you slip, or — or —"

"No," replied Father Buck sadly, "it was as I expected. I am getting old, White Tail, and have lost my spring. I have reached the age where I am no longer qualified to lead the herd. If any of the other bucks knew this they would instantly demand a new leader. It's the law of the herd."

"But — but —" stammered White Tail. "You could do it again. You didn't get a good start."

"No, it wasn't that, White Tail. It was my age. I can no longer spring across Stepping Stone brook. I am not fit to be leader of the herd."

Father Buck's proud head drooped, and something like a tear gleamed in his eyes. It was hard to acknowledge that he was failing, and that in a few seasons he would be looked upon as a useless old buck who would have to

take orders from another much younger than he. But it was the law of the herd — and the law of life.

"I can't believe it!" exclaimed White Tail. "I won't believe it! I know you can leap across the brook. You must try it again. What I can do you can do!"

Faher Buck raised his head and smiled. All the sadness left his eyes, and pride and gratefulness took its place.

"No, White Tail," he replied. "I cannot do it. I put in that jump all the strength I had — and I failed. But don't think I'm sad. I'm not. I knew it had to come some day. But I'm glad that my son can take my place. I can be happy yet — and Mother Deer will share it with me — because you have qualified so well to be our leader. I am thankful for that."

But White Tail was not convinced. It was hard for him to accept the truth. Father Buck was still to him the finest, proudest, wisest and strongest leader he knew, and he wanted him to continue so.

"Some other day when you feel better you will come out here and try the jump again," he said. "I know you don't feel well today. Tomorrow you will feel better."

Father Buck shook his head slowly. "I see you are hard to convince, White Tail. But I will show you in another way. How far is it from here to Puma's hunting ground?"

"Ten miles or more."

"Then we will go to it. We will race to it at a good speed. I want you to set the pace — the swiftest you can. You must run as if Puma or Timber Wolf was on your trail. I will follow. You must neither look to the right or to the left, or back of you. Run with all your might."

"You will follow close behind me?"

"I will follow you."

Now White Tail looked with glee upon this run, for he was in fine condition. His limbs seemed aching for a long, hard run, and his father wanted to see how quickly he could make the race. He would show him. He wouldn't disappoint him.

Shortly afterward he started off, taking a broad trail through the woods. He trotted along merrily, and soon began running in long leaps and bounds that carried him far and fast. When he came to obstructions in his path he leaped over them as easily as a boy or girl would jump over a log.

Faster and faster he flew through the woods, his fine head set well back, and his

antlers almost resting on his neck. His eyes were kept glued to the trail ahead. He ran so easily and smoothly that it seemed as if he was making no effort. For the first five miles he showed hardly any results of his wild run, but in the last half of the distance he began to perspire a little, and the white foam settled on his flanks.

But he never stopped or turned until he reached the boundary line of Puma's hunting ground. Then he halted and whirled around.

"How was that?" he asked.

But Father Buck was not there. He was alone. His father was nowhere in sight. Startled and surprised by this he trotted back a few paces and called to him. Then, not finding him, he became frightened. Had something happened to his father?

Perhaps Puma had sprung out of the bushes and killed him, or Timber Wolf had driven him off the trail, and was even now chasing him. White Tail was so alarmed that he retraced his footsteps, calling every little while for Father Buck. It was a dangerous thing to do, for in calling he might attract Puma or Timber Wolf. But his anxiety for his father made him forget all caution.

He found him a long way back on the trail, lying in the bushes, panting with exhaustion.

As soon as he discovered him, White Tail ran up to him with a little bleat of joy.

"Oh, I thought something terrible had happened to you!" he exclaimed. "What is it? Did you stumble? You haven't broken a leg, have you?"

"No, White Tail," was the panting reply. "Nothing has happened to me. I couldn't keep up with you. I tried my best. I hung on until I fell down with exhaustion. I have run my last race. I did it to show you that I am growing older and that my powers are weakening. You would not be convinced when I failed to leap the brook. Now you will have to believe."

Then it dawned upon White Tail that the race to Puma's hunting ground was simply to show him that his father could no longer keep up with the young bucks of the herd. It was hard for Father Buck thus to show his failing powers, but it was better to do it with his son as the only witness than to fail before all the herd.

"It is my downfall, White Tail," he added. "But I wanted only you as witness. Now you know. My leadership will soon end, but when the day comes you must be able to take my place. That will be my satisfaction, and your mother's. She knew that the time was

approaching, and she will not be heavy-hearted."

White Tail was terribly distressed by this news, but after a while a fierce joy came to him. "I shall prove myself worthy of you, Father Buck," he said. "Yes, I will take your place. I will fight for it now that you and Mother Deer want it. Yes, I will fight for the leadership until the last breath."

"Those are the words I've longed to hear, White Tail. Now I am contented. We will return to the herd. My day's work is done."

As they trotted slowly back to the herd, they planned for the future. Both knew that the future race would be between White Tail and Young Black Buck. But of this you will read in the next story.

STORY III

Young Black Buck's Challenge

Young Black Buck had, of course, been in training all this time, for it is the law of the deer that none shall aspire for the leadership of a herd until he has learned all the ways of the woods, and can out-pace and out-jump his father and mother. All the laws of the deer are very strict, for the safety of all depends upon the leader.

Black Buck had taken his son through the woods, as Father Buck had taken White Tail, showing him the dangers and pitfalls, and instructing him how to avoid them and what to do when danger threatened. He had taken him secretly to Stepping Stone brook, and made him jump it; and he had tested his speed and endurance in a race with himself.

Father Buck had no illusions about what Black Buck was doing, and he tried to prepare White Tail to meet Young Black Buck on equal terms. It was like bringing up two boys for a contest in speed, strength, endur-

ance, wisdom and courage. It was a Spartan education, but it was necessary for the good of the herd.

Then one day the clash came for a preliminary trial of skill. The herd had wandered down from the timberland to the open woods below where the new buds of the birches offered succulent food. There was no sign of danger in the air, and the herd grazed peacefully on soft young twigs and opening buds.

When they had wandered to the brink of the canyon that cut through the North Woods below Stepping Stone brook, the leaders paused and started to turn the young does and fawns back. It was dangerous to permit them to eat too close to the edge of the precipice. If one should fall over, the rocks below would crack every bone in its body.

Black Buck suddenly raised his head, and then whispered to his son: "Think you can jump the canyon safely? If so it is a good time to challenge White Tail. We may find out then what he can do. If he balks at it, we will know he is timid or under-trained."

Young Black Buck walked to the edge, and gazed down it and then across it. It was a dangerous leap, for if he missed by an inch he would fall to the bottom thirty feet below where the hard rocks would crush him. He

sniffed the air, and then returned to his father's side.

"I can do it," he replied. "I've made longer jumps."

"Yes, but if you should fail you would be killed. Make sure of yourself before you sound the challenge. Go below, where the canyon is not so steep, but just as wide. Practice there alone until you have confidence. If you fail no harm will be done. You can wait another day."

Young Black Buck separated himself from the herd and made his way to a point half a mile down the canyon. On either side here the rocks were covered with moss and turf, and the edges dropped only a few feet. If he failed the fall would not hurt him.

Unseen by the others, he made the attempt, and cleared the space successfully in the first leap. Then to make sure he tried it again and again, lighting easily on the opposite embankment each time.

Gloating with pride and triumph, he trotted back to Black Buck, and reported. "I never failed once. If the distance here is no greater across I can do it easily."

"It is no greater, but if anything a few inches less," replied Black Buck. "If you

can do it below, you will do it here. Issue the challenge."

Young Black Buck trotted away, and, raising his head in the air, a peculiar bellowing noise issued from his throat. It was the buck's challenge to a contest. Every deer knew its meaning, and raised a head to see who was calling. White Tail, feeding some distance off with Mother Deer and Father Buck, heard it, and instantly turned his head in Young Black Buck's direction.

"It's Young Black Buck's challenge," whispered Father Buck. "You must accept it. It may be a challenge to a race or fight. Whatever it is you must accept it."

"I'm ready," replied White Tail, starting off.

"Who will leap the canyon with me!" bellowed Young Black Buck. "I shall lead where none dare follow! None shall then dispute my claim to leadership. Come those who dare!"

Before White Tail reached the spot, the whole herd was crowding around the challenger. They saw a prospect of a free entertainment, and they bucked and butted each other to get in front. None of the other young bucks had accepted the challenge. One glance at the yawning depth of the canyon

had made them withdraw with sickening fear. It looked much deeper than it was, and twice as wide.

White Tail pushed his way through the crowds until he stood before Young Black Buck. The sight of him brought a quick remark from the challenger's mouth.

"You, White Tail!" he exclaimed. "You wish to accept the challenge? Beware how you speak without thinking. Go and look down the chasm! It means death if you fail! Think twice before you speak!"

Now when Father Buck heard the nature of the challenge he felt a great fear. He had never shown the canyon to White Tail, and he didn't know whether he could leap across it or not. He reproached himself for omitting this part of his training.

Mother Deer's heart gave a great throb. If White Tail failed she knew he would be crushed to death on the rocks below. She could not endure such a sight. Better that her son should lose the leadership than be killed.

"No, no, White Tail," she cried, "you must not accept the challenge. You must not! I can't lose you!"

Black Buck, who had been standing back of the crowd, heard, and was greatly pleased, for he knew now that Father Buck hadn't

taught White Tail to jump the canyon. Few had ever taken the leap without practicing first at the place below where there was no danger. It was the fear of not being able to clear the distance that caused the real danger.

"You must not say that," interrupted Father Buck, frowning at Mother Deer. "The honor of our family is at stake. White Tail must accept the challenge."

Before Mother Deer could answer this, White Tail had settled the dispute. "Whatever you can do, Young Black Buck," he said, "I will do. More than that, I will lead."

"You will take the leap first?" queried Young Black Buck. "Then, as the challenger, I have the right of choice. You can go first, White Tail."

"But where I go you must follow," retorted White Tail. "If not, you shall be forever disgraced."

"If you are afraid I'll lead," sneered Young Black Buck.

"No, I'll go first!"

White Tail didn't even go to the edge of the precipice to look down or to measure the distance across. What was the use? He would make the greatest jump of his life. If he failed he would die knowing he had done his best. What more could he do?

He ran back a short distance, and then facing the canyon he made a swift dash for it. At the brink he threw all his strength in a mighty leap, and his body shot upward and outward, forming a beautiful curve. He kept his eyes ahead, and never once looked down.

It was a splendid jump. It carried him clear across the canyon, and landed him safely a yard beyond the opposite edge. He knew by the shouts that he had succeeded even before his feet touched ground. Then with a proud toss of his head he turned and looked at Young Black Buck. It was his turn now. Could he do it?

STORY IV

Father Buck's Decision

Young Black Buck was greatly chagrined at White Tail's great jump, for he knew that he had crossed the canyon without any previous training. It showed that White Tail had courage as well as strength and skill. It was a triumph for him that none appreciated more than Young Black Buck and his father.

"Now, Young Black Buck," White Tail called from the opposite side, "follow me, or forever cease challenging."

There was nothing for Young Black Buck to do but take the jump. All eyes were turned on him. For the first time a feeling of fear possessed him. He had looked down the chasm, and knew what waited him if he fell short. Suppose he should make a false step or stumble at the last moment. The fall would be terrible. If not actually killed, he would break his legs at the very least.

Black Buck saw the expression of fear in his son's eyes, and whispered to him: "Don't look below! Keep your eyes up and ahead!"

Young Black Buck gathered himself for the short run, and long jump. He knew that he had to take it, and that he had to succeed. He ran with all his might, and then sprang forward in a quick spring.

If it hadn't been for his nervousness, he certainly would have cleared the chasm without accident, but chagrin, anger and fear had possession of him, and they were responsible for a misstep at the last moment. When his body was launched through the air, he knew that he hadn't put in the jump all the power he had.

Then too the fear of a failure alarmed him. He glanced down, and saw the terrible chasm yawning below to receive him. This gave his body a side lurch, and instead of clearing the chasm in a beautiful jump his forefeet touched the opposite side only a foot from the edge, and his hind hoofs missed it by an inch.

No one could see the accident so quickly or plainly as White Tail, who stood within a few feet of him. He saw that Young Black Buck was going to miss before his front hoofs touched the embankment.

Now the thought of his missing the rock, and falling to the bottom of the chasm in a broken heap, horrified White Tail so that he forgot all his triumph and desire to win. His

greatest desire was to save Young Black Buck from an awful death.

Before he reached the embankment, White Tail jumped to the edge, and quick as a wink stretched forth his head, caught Young Black Buck by a prong of his antlers. He got a good hold with his teeth, and then as the leaping buck's hind feet slipped down and his body began to sway backward, White Tail braced his feet, and jerked backward with all his strength.

It was enough to overcome the balance of the frightened jumper. Instead of falling backward into the chasm, he stumbled forward, and then catching his hind hoofs on the edge he managed to climb up the embankment.

It was all done so quickly and skilfully that the watchers on the opposite bank hardly knew what had happened. They knew in some way that Young Black Buck had stumbled and nearly fallen in the chasm. They had also seen White Tail reach forward and grab or push him. They couldn't very well say just what he did.

But Black Buck, seeing that his son had failed, and angry at the thought of White Tail's triumph, was quick to see a way to change defeat into triumph. Before his son could recover his breath and stop his trem-

bling, Black Buck roared out with all his might:

"Foul! That was a foul! White Tail got in the way, and tried to throw my son off the precipice!"

"No, No!" several shouted. "Not that! White Tail wouldn't do that!"

"Ask my son if what I say isn't true? He should know!" rumbled Black Buck.

Young Black Buck was almost as quick as his father to see the chance of redeeming himself in the eyes of the whole herd, and he shook his head with delight. His fear and trembling all left him.

"Speak, Young Black Buck!" shouted his father. "Did White Tail interfere with you? Speak before it is too late!"

Young Black Buck was ready with his answer. "Yes, he stood in my way," he replied, "and when I reached the edge he bit at me, and tried to push me off the edge."

White Tail started in surprise and horror at this accusation, for he was too stunned to speak. Then, when he realized what the charge meant, he said:

"You know I didn't do that, Young Black Buck! If I hadn't grabbed your antlers you would have fallen over and been crushed to death. Oh, how could you say such a thing!"

"That's a fine story to tell!" jeered Young Black Buck. "Who do you think will believe it! You wanted to kill me so you could have no challenger for the leadership. Well, I'm alive, and I'll beat you to it yet."

Now the uproar on the other side was intense. Some believed that White Tail had actually tried to push his rival down the chasm, and others were equally certain that the son of Father Buck could never be guilty of such a crime. The commotion was approaching the proportions of a riot when Father Buck brought silence with a roar of authority.

"Be quiet!" he bellowed. "We must settle this dispute right. If my son was guilty of such a crime, I would be the first to disown him and drive him from the herd in disgrace. But if he is innocent, I will back him up with all my might."

He turned fiercely on Black Buck, as he said this, his eyes flashing and his antlers bobbing threateningly. Black Buck was not anxious to get in a fight with the leader, and he backed away grumbling.

"I will protect my son, too," he breathed angrily, "if he is right."

"That is your duty," roared Father Buck, "and it is your duty to denounce him if he's

in the wrong. Will you do that also?"

Black Buck made some inaudible reply, and backed still further away from the flashing eyes.

"Who saw White Tail push Young Black Buck off the edge?" asked Father Buck, addressing the crowd.

A dozen or more voices answered in the affirmative. Without changing the expression of his face, Father Buck then added: "Who saw White Tail grab Young Black Buck, and try to save him from a fall?"

An equal number of voices responded promptly. To make sure Father Buck counted them, and then counted those who had answered in favor of Young Black Buck. They were the same! Twenty yeas and twenty noes!

"That makes it hard for me to decide," murmured Father Buck. "A tie is never a pleasant vote for a leader, for he must decide then one way or the other himself. In this case it's doubly hard for me."

He stopped and looked at the herd, and then added: "You know me, and you know I would be the last to decide in favor of my son if I thought he was wrong. Therefore, in giving my decision, I know you will think I'm doing justice. Then I say to you that I

saw White Tail help Young Black Buck up the slope. Had it not been for his help one of our number would be down below there dead."

There was a silence, and a shudder passed through the whole herd. Father Buck's decision did not affect them so much as the thought of what might have happened. They were glad that it had ended this way, with no bones broken. White Tail was exonerated in their eyes.

STORY V

Young Black Buck's Challenge to a Race

White Tail was so angry at Young Black Buck for accusing him falsely that for a moment after Father Buck's decision, he couldn't find his tongue to speak. He simply glared at Young Black Buck, and for the first time there came into his mind a desire to punish his accuser. He knew then that he would have to fight his antagonist some day, and the battle would be a long and hard one, with neither side giving any terms.

When the excitement had quieted a little, he turned to Young Black Buck, and said: "You know that you spoke falsely, and knowing it your conscience should trouble you."

Young Black Buck grinned. "But nobody else knows it," he replied. "Therefore my conscience don't trouble me much."

"Some day," added White Tail, "you will pay for this. We want no deceiver as the leader of the herd. I'll battle you for the position."

"Oh!" sneered the other. "That's a pretty speech, White Tail. But we can't battle for the leadership until Father Buck has failed in the chase or hunt. He's leader until then."

"But the day will come when it will be between you and me."

"And then," replied Young Black Buck, airily, "I'll see that you get the worst licking you ever had."

"No, I think it will be the other way."

White Tail crossed the chasm again and joined the herd. There were plenty to sympathize with him, and they expressed themselves frankly. But there were not lacking others who admired Young Black Buck, and felt that he had been unjustly accused.

Mother Deer whispered in her son's ears: "Never mind, White Tail. We have to learn to take such things in life unselfishly. Right always triumphs in the end. Don't let it worry you."

"It doesn't worry me, Mother Deer. But it makes me feel angry."

Further conversation was stopped by Father Buck announcing that the herd would go to the lower timberland to graze on the succulent grass that bordered Puma's hunting ground. The grass was in the rich, tender stage, and the deer enjoyed it as a sort of luxury. The

fact that Puma had selected this spot as his special hunting ground could not keep the deer away, and Father Buck's announcement was hailed with delight.

"We must keep together," he cautioned, "with the does and fawns inside, and the bucks outside, for Puma may be abroad, although he's not to be feared so much in the day time. If he's asleep in his lair we won't disturb him."

The spice of danger added to the zest of the adventure. The grass always had a much sweeter taste and a richer flavor when it was gathered right under the nose of Puma. The young bucks kicked up their heels and ran ahead. While they were not anxious to draw Puma from his lair, they wanted to show to the fawns and does they were unafraid.

"If Puma comes for me I'll show him a clean pair of heels!" boasted one

"And I," said another, "will give him a race that he'll never forget."

Little did they know of what they were boasting. Puma the Mountain Lion never laid any great claim to swift, long distance running. He knew he was no match for the fleet deer in this respect.

But he had ways and tricks of his own. His favorite method was to hide among the thick

foliage of the trees, and when a buck or doe passed underneath to spring upon its back. Once caught in this way no deer had a chance to escape. All the speed in the world would not avail the poor creature then.

Puma was a terrible hunter. At night time he roamed about the dark woods and scented out his sleeping prey, and with one blow from his great paw he could break the back of a buck or crush the skull of a smaller animal. He could climb a tree like a cat, and crouch flat in the bushes out of sight to spring up as swiftly as a deer leaping a chasm.

All the older deer knew the ways of Puma, some from terrifying experiences, and others only from hearsay. Ever since Father Buck had been leader of the herd, they had avoided Puma, and not one had fallen a prey to his voracious appetite. Perhaps they didn't fully appreciate this, for continued safety from danger often makes us think there is no real danger after all.

So when he proposed leading the herd down to the succulent grass, bordering the woods where Puma hunted, he took great precaution to avoid any risk. Several of the older bucks were sent ahead scouting, and they returned at intervals to report.

Father Buck led them down to the broad, shallow stream that he and White Tail had crossed that day on their return from Puma's hunting ground. But instead of wading down the river a short distance, the leader kept them wading until they had skirted the hunting ground of Timber Wolf. He had almost as much fear of Timber as of Puma.

They kept to the left bank of the stream, and then crossed a shallow ford where the grass and reeds grew in such dense masses. They began feeding at once, but not until bucks had been sent inland to scout for Puma. They returned to report that Puma was not abroad. They had crossed and re-crossed his old trails, but there was no fresh scent in the air.

"He's probably sleeping after a good night of hunting," Black Buck remarked. "I don't think there's any danger."

But the leader was taking no chances. He posted scouts in the woods and on high rocks where they could watch, listen and smell. Then the rest of the herd enjoyed their feast of rich grass and reeds. They munched greedily at them, their eyes filled with happiness, and making as little noise as possible.

Now Young Black Buck should have been satisfied to eat and enjoy himself with the rest

but after he had filled his stomach he began to feel so much better that he trotted around from one group to another in the most restless manner. Seeing White Tail feeding alone, a sudden desire to get even with him for the morning's work seized him.

"Ho, White Tail!" he called. "I challenge you to a race. We'll scare up Puma maybe, but that will give us a good chance to show him how little we are afraid of him."

"Is it wise to arouse him?" asked White Tail.

"Wise!" sniffed Young Black Buck. "Must you ask that question whenever you want to do something? But if you're afraid to race me through his hunting ground well and good. I'll go alone."

"I'm not afraid," replied White Tail, "and I will accept your challenge if the older ones say it is all right."

Young Black Buck reported the matter to the leaders, and after a consultation Father Buck announced: "We're ready to go home, and if Puma is aroused we'll flee. Perhaps it's a good plan to give Young Black Buck and White Tail a chance to see Puma. They will be on the lookout for him, and when he appears they can run home. Yes, they

must learn some day to meet him, and it is well that it should be today."

With the consent of the leader of the herd the two young bucks started off into the lower woods to make a complete circuit of Puma's hunting ground. It was a long, wild run, and they would need all their strength and powers. Father Buck started them off, and they disappeared in the woods like two arrows shot from a bow. What happened to them in the race will be told in the next story.

STORY VI

Downy the Woodpecker Brings Startling News

Swift as the wind, and almost as silently, White Tail and Young Black Buck swept through the low timberland, skirting the edge of Puma's hunting ground so they could circuit it and return to the starting point. Like two good long-distance runners, neither made an effort to take the lead at first.

It was to be a test of endurance rather than of short sprinting. Silently, side by side, they ran at first, leaping over fallen logs and trees in long graceful jumps, and spurting in sharp bursts of speed where the trail was broad and open.

It was not until they had covered the first mile, that first one and then the other attempted to take the lead. Young Black Buck shot ahead first, taking advantage of an open trail, but a moment later White Tail leaped over a clump of bushes and rushed ahead. Young

Black Buck pushed in the lead again at the first opportunity.

Neither took these short spurts seriously, for they indicated nothing. Not until they had covered the second mile did they begin to let out in real earnestness. Black Buck then, to see whether White Tail was beginning to show any strain, rushed ahead, and spread himself out in a long, steady lope.

White Tail kept close behind him until his speed began to slacken, and then to show that he was still fresh and strong he dashed ahead and took the lead. Then followed another mile of hard running. Both bucks were beginning to perspire freely now, and the white lather showed on their flanks.

But neither one was winded or anywhere near the end of their strength. White Tail felt that he could keep up the gait nearly all day. He felt singularly fresh and strong. They had made half the circuit before either could try to outdistance the other.

The rest of the race would decide which was the champion. Either they had to run abreast of each other until the end, or one had to take the lead. Suddenly, to White Tail's surprise, Young Black Buck slowed down, and said:

"We're on even terms up to this point,

White Tail. Suppose we rest awhile, and then go on. The woods are so beautiful here, and I want to see what kind of a place Puma lives in. He's around here somewhere, I suppose."

"Yes, I came here one day with Father Buck, and he showed me where Puma was. I smelt him and heard him."

"How exciting!" exclaimed Young Black Buck. "I wonder if we'll hear and smell him today. I want to know what he looks like."

"I'm not so interested in that," laughed White Tail. "I don't want to get so close to him that he can see me."

"No, but we might see him, and then steal silently away without being caught."

White Tail wasn't so sure of that. He had a wholesome dread of Puma's hunting powers.

"We might stumble upon him and he see us first," he added. "He's very sly, and can hide so no one can see him."

"But we could smell him first."

"Not if we were on the wrong side of the wind. Have you noticed which way the wind is blowing?"

"Why, yes, from the right."

"Then we don't have to fear anything on that side. We must keep our eyes and ears open on the left."

"It's my opinion," said Young Black Buck slowly, "that Puma's greatly over-rated. Why, he hasn't killed one of the herd as long as any one can remember."

"No, but that's because Father Buck has been such a wise leader."

Young Black Buck sniffed in scorn. "I don't know that he's been any better or wiser than other leaders," was the retort. "If my father had been leader Puma or Timber Wolf wouldn't have caught a deer. They wouldn't have dared. They're all afraid of him."

White Tail felt that this boasting wouldn't get them anywhere, and would in the end lead to unpleasant words; but he knew that if Puma or Timber Wolf heard it they would laugh in glee.

"If you're rested suppose we go back," White Tail said. "We're going to make quicker time back. I'm going to run my best."

"And I too. I'm going to beat you. I'm sorry you got tired out, and had to rest. Well, I'm ready."

White Tail could afford a smile at this remark, for Young Black Buck had made the request to stop for a short time. Tired out! Why, he felt as fresh and strong as when they started. He would punish Young Black

Buck by making his defeat as unpleasant as he could.

But before either one could start for the return trip there was a noise among the leaves of the spruce tree under which they were standing, and with visions of Puma crouching among the branches ready to drop down upon them their hearts gave a great bound and almost stood still. In another moment they would have been off like a shot, but there was a flutter of wings, and Downy the Woodpecker, who had made the noise with his beak, spoke.

"Hist! Listen!" he called. "Listen, White Tail—and you too, Young Black Buck!"

Both of the runners stopped and looked up among the branches of the trees where Downy was sitting.

"Puma is on your trail," Downy added. "He caught your wind way back there, and he's been trailing you ever since. I saw him, and hurried to tell you."

"Thank you, Downy," replied White Tail. "It's time we were off. He can never catch us if he's behind."

"I didn't say he was behind you," replied Downy. "He was on your trail, but Puma's too wise to follow you that way. You don't know him. When he picked up your trail, he

followed you by the wind. While you were running around in a circle, he's been cutting across it. He's between you and the herd."

"In that case," said Young Black Buck in a frightened voice, "we'll take a wide circuit, and he'll miss us."

Again Downy shook his head. "You are young," he said, "and don't know how Puma hunts. He hunts with his mate, and she'll be off to the right to head you off."

"Then what can we do?" asked Young Black Buck, his legs shaking and his voice trembling.

"I really don't know what to say. I came here to tell you of your danger. I can't tell you what to do."

"Couldn't we go back a little on our track, and then get around Puma and his mate?" asked White Tail, struggling hard to keep cool.

"I'm afraid if you do that you'll run into Timber Wolf and his family. Puma gave him the alarm, and he's out with his whole pack to cut you off in that direction."

By this time Young Black Buck was so excited and frightened that he hardly knew what to do. To be cornered by Puma and Timber Wolf, with all the yelping pack, was a terrible thing, and there seemed no way of

escape. A sudden rustling in the bushes made him jump nearly five feet away. Even White Tail leaped to one side.

But it wasn't Puma or Timber Wolf. It was Washer the Raccoon, and what Washer had to propose will appear in the next story. Washer was considered a very wise, shrewd animal, and perhaps he had a way for them to escape.

STORY VII

A Race With Puma and Timber

Washer the Raccoon poked his nose out of the bushes, and looked blinkingly at White Tail and Young Black Buck, while Downy the Woodpecker gazed down at all three with an expression in his eyes that plainly said: "Well, I'm glad I've got wings, and can fly away if I want to."

"Goodness!" grunted White Tail. "You frightened the life out of us, Washer! We thought you were Puma or Timber creeping upon us."

"Well, I've been mistaken for Groundy and Billy Mink, but never for Puma or Timber before," replied Washer. "It must be that you're excited or have a bad conscience. I wonder which it is."

"Not the latter, I hope," answered White Tail. "But as for being excited, I think we have good reason for that. Downy just brought us word that Puma and Timber, with

their families are on our trail, and have us surrounded."

Washer sat up on his hind legs, and leaned against a tree. His shrewd, golden eyes flashed brightly in the sunshine, and his double row of white teeth glistened every time he opened his mouth.

"If that's the case," he said, "I think it's about time I took to my hole. I have no love or respect for Puma and Timber."

"Neither have we," said Young Black Buck, "but we have no hole to run in. What are we going to do?"

"If you only had wings I could answer that question," interrupted Downy. "I know what I'd do."

"And if you had a hole you could crawl in, I could advise you," added Washer.

Of course, this brought no relief to either White Tail's or Young Black Buck's harassed minds. They weren't interested in what Downy or Washer would do. They wanted to know what they could do to escape the terrible trap.

Suddenly to make their situation more desperate, a distant howl rent the air. It was Timber Wolf calling to the pack. Almost instantly there was an answering cry on the

left, then another in front, and a third on the right.

"It's the pack's hunting cry," exclaimed Washer. "They're calling to each other as they close in. Yes, they've picked up your scent, White Tail."

Young Black Buck got so frightened and excited that he leaped around in a circle, uttering plaintive little whimpers. "I'm going to run," he said, "even if I do nothing but go around and around in circles. I can't stand still."

"You'd better save your strength, Young Black Buck," advised White Tail. "You may need all of it for the race, for it is clear to me that we must trust to our heels to beat them."

"What's that?" exclaimed Young Black Buck, as a snarl in the distance alarmed them.

"It's Puma and his mate creeping up from this direction," said White Tail more alarmed than ever. "With Puma and his mate in the rear, and Timber's pack in front and on either side, what chance have we?"

"Wait a minute!" exclaimed Washer quietly. "I think I can suggest a way. My hole is right on the edge of Black Ravine. I built it there so I could watch the sun rise

every morning. It's a beautiful place, even if I do say so."

White Tail and Young Black Buck turned to him, and waited impatiently for him to proceed. Washer was aggravatingly slow. They were not a bit interested in the beautiful view he had from his hole.

"Black Ravine drops down fifty feet, and if I should ever forget myself and fall over the edge it would be the last of me," Washer continued, deliberately picking his teeth with a twig. "Yes, I told Mrs. Washer several times it was a beautiful but dangerous spot to bring up our children. They might tumble into the ravine."

"Never mind the ravine, Washer," interrupted White Tail. "You said you had a way for us to escape. Please tell us what it is."

"I was coming to that. You're very impatient, White Tail. And the ravine has a good deal to do with my plan. It's twenty feet across from side to side. Can you jump twenty feet?"

"Why, I don't know, but maybe if—"

"All right then," Washer interrupted. "I'll show you the way to Black Ravine in front of my house. If Puma or Timber pursue you all you got to do is to leap across the ravine.

Timber couldn't follow you, and I don't think Puma can jump that far. If he couldn't you'd have a big head start. Puma and Timber would have to go a mile down the ravine before they could cross. It's wider in front of my house than at the ends."

Washer's plan dawned upon their minds in an instant, and both bucks sprang up as if to start for Black Ravine at once.

"We'll do it!" exclaimed White Tail. "I'll make the jump if I fall in the ravine. It's better that way than to be pulled down by Puma or Timber."

"It's much better not to fall at all," was Washer's quiet remark. "But now don't get excited, or you'll jump from the frying-pan into the fire. How do you know if one of Timber's family isn't watching the ravine? He may be."

This suggestion dashed their hopes, and sent the cold chills down their backs. No one could tell where the wolves and pumas were scattered. They were closing in upon them on all sides. They might surprise the cornered bucks before ever they could reach Black Ravine.

"The only way I can suggest," added Washer, "is for Downy to fly ahead, and re-

port to us where they're hiding. You could do that, Downy, couldn't you?"

"Why, certainly. I'd be glad to."

"Then I wouldn't waste any time."

Downy immediately flew away in the direction of Black Ravine, while White Tail and Young Black Buck waited impatiently for his return. It seemed a long, long time to them, and every few moments they could hear the call of Timber and his pack. They were drawing nearer and nearer until finally it seemed as if one was in the bushes not a dozen rods away.

Downy came back finally, and said:

"It's all right, but you must hurry. They're closing in so that if you don't reach Black Ravine soon they'll head you off. This way! Follow me!"

He flew off to the right, but swift as he was White Tail and Young Buck were hardly a yard behind him. They fairly flew across the ground, leaping low bushes and trees in their flight. Washer, being much slower, decided not to follow. He knew another hole where he could hide until the danger was over.

"Here they come!" screamed Downy suddenly. "Now run for your lives! There's Black Ravine ahead!"

At the same instant Timber and his pack broke cover, and started for the fleeing bucks in the open. Close on their right was Puma and his mate. They set up a yelping and howling that made the blood of the deer curdle. It had to be a short race, for other wolves ahead threatened to cut them off.

But there was Black Ravine. Neither White Tail nor Young Black Buck knew how wide it was, or whether they could cross it, but when they reached the edge they shot out in one mighty leap and landed on the opposite side. Could Puma follow? In the next story you will find out what he did.

STORY VIII

Mrs. Puma and Timber Fight

The leap across Black Ravine carried White Tail and Young Black Buck away from the yapping jaws of Timber Wolf and his pack. Not one of them dared to follow. They could no more do it than fly. They stopped at the edge and howled woefully as they saw their prey escape.

But not Puma the Mountain Lion. He was a wonderful jumper himself and the sight of the escaping bucks made him wild with rage. Besides, he was terribly hungry, and he was disappointed in not catching at least one of the bucks.

When he came to the edge of the ravine he hesitated a minute, snarling, spitting and whisking his long tail. He was so angry that he knocked one of the wolves over when he got in his way. For a moment there was a savage outcry, and Timber threatened to pounce upon Puma's back; but the fear of his powerful claws dissuaded him.

"Get away from the edge, you snarling, sniveling sons of cowards!" Puma growled. "When did a wolf ever bring down a buck in fair play? You howl and snap, and make a great fuss, but you're cowards at heart! Let me show you what a Mountain Lion can do. Back! Back from the edge, I say!"

The wolves obeyed, but not without much snapping of teeth and angry growls. Puma walked back a few paces, and turned to face the cliff. Then with a sudden run and spring he took the long leap.

Ordinarily Puma would have hesitated a long time before attempting to jump across Black Ravine, but he was wild with anger and disappointment. Besides, he knew Timber and his pack were watching him, as well as his own mate. He was puffed up with pride to show what he could do.

But, alas! pride had its downfall. Puma had miscalculated the distance. He realized this before he was half across, and to make up for it he began squirming and jerking in mid-air as if that would help him. It did in a way, for cat-like he had the wonderful facility of actually jumping and leaping forward with his feet off the ground.

But it was of no avail. He still lacked sufficient force to carry him to the other side.

He stretched one fore-paw far out, hoping to grasp the edge, and it did touch the rock, but it only scratched and scraped it.

When he found himself falling downward, he thrust out the other fore-leg and clawed at the steep side of the cliff. But there was nothing for him to hold to. The rocks were so hard that his claws could get no purchase.

Down he went another yard. The edge of the cliff was over his head, and fifty feet below was the hard bottom of the ravine. A fall there would surely dash out his brains and break every bone in his body.

Twenty feet down, doubling, whirling and screaming, Puma saw a small stunted tree growing from a cleft in the side. He made one mighty lunge for this, and caught it. He landed with a thud against it, and clung to its branches for dear life. He was so shaken by the fall that for a moment he could do nothing but blink and gasp. The tree had scratched him in a dozen places, and the hard rocks bruised and hurt his body. One paw was bleeding, and the other was so sore that he held it up in the air.

Over his head, some twenty feet, was the top of the cliff, with its sides so steep that no Puma could hope to crawl up them. Below was the bottom which seemed equally difficult

to reach. Opposite, looking down at him, were Timber and his family.

"What a lucky fall for you, Puma," jeered Timber. "And what a poor jump! White Tail and Young Black Buck cleared it easily, and you couldn't cross it! Now, braggart, what are you going to do to get out? You can hang there and rot before I'll help you! Ho! Ho! You call my tribe cowards! Then I call you and yours dirty braggarts! You couldn't—"

A rumbling growl at Timber's left caused him to turn suddenly. Puma's mate was facing him, with her eyes spitting fire, and her great right claw raised to strike.

"Son of a coward," she thundered, "how dare you speak that way to one of my family! Puma may be caught down there, but you have me to reckon with!"

Timber immediately saw his mistake. He had forgotten Mrs. Puma, who was almost as ferocious as Puma. She was smaller, but fully as quick and lithe. Timber's manners immediately changed, and he became as meek and fawning as he was before threatening and defiant.

"I didn't refer to you, Mrs. Puma," he whined. "Of course, I know you are much stronger and quicker than Puma, and—"

"You lie, you sniveling cur!" interrupted Mrs. Puma. "For the tail of a deer I'd knock you in the ravine for my mate to eat for his supper."

Timber slinked back from the edge. He knew that one blow from that upraised paw would send him hurtling through space. But once back from the edge his manner changed again. Mrs. Puma stood near the edge now, and surrounding her was the half circle of wolves. All of Timber's pack had arrived, and they were as thirsty as he for blood. They were ten to one.

It flashed through Timber's mind that this was a good time to settle an old score with Puma. He had never taken kindly to Puma's lordly ways in dividing the hunting ground between them. Puma had always claimed more than his share of the prey. Sometimes he had eaten three quarters of a carcass, and only turned over a small portion to Timber's family.

And they were a hungry family, half starved at times when the hunting was poor. All his old grievances came back to him, and he felt that here was a chance to settle the dispute for good. Puma was caught in the ravine, where he might starve and die. Why not then push Mrs. Puma after him?

"Oh, Mrs. Puma," he said, "you flatter me, My family aren't such cowards as you think. Just to show you turn around and see them. They're all here—the whole pack!"

Mrs. Puma whirled about and saw the semi-circle of snarling, snapping wolves. Then for the first time in her life she felt afraid. She might kill two or three of Timber's family before they conquered her, but eventually they would drive her over the cliff. But it was no time to show fear. That would be the signal for the wolves to close in on her.

"I see them—the whole pack," she snarled. "And every one of them a coward! Not one dare touch me unless the others push him within reach of my claws. See, the whole pack jumps and screams when I strike."

With a vicious drive of her paw she made those nearest leap back in fear. She followed this up with another drive. Timber saw that, unless he acted at once, his family would become panic-stricken. Raising himself on his hind feet ready for a spring, he opened his mouth, and uttered the hunting cry of the pack. Then at a given signal they attacked all at once.

They darted forward with yelps of defiance, Timber leading. But what a surprise awaited them! Mrs. Puma had guessed their actions,

and with a mighty spring in the air she leaped clear over the backs of the encircling crowd. It was a wonderful spring, and nothing but fear could have made her do it. It landed her safely back of the wolves.

Then before they could turn and charge again, she took another spring, and was safe in the branches of a tree. "Some other day, thou dog of a coward!" Mrs. Puma said. "I'll sleep here until you get tired of waiting."

Having got Mrs. Puma out of trouble we will follow White Tail in the next story.

STORY IX

Young Black Buck Has an Accident

It is hard work to starve out Puma the Mountain Lion when treed, and perhaps harder yet to imprison him on the side of a steep cliff. Timber Wolf knew this, and after the escape of Mrs. Puma up the tree, he grew uneasy, and decided that it was safer for him to lead the pack back to their own hunting ground.

When they had gone Mrs. Puma leaped down to the ground, and ran to the edge of the ravine to see what had become of her mate. She was not greatly surprised when she saw that he had slowly made his way to the bottom of the chasm, and was looking up to see where she was. With a little cry of joy she trotted down to the end of the ravine to rejoin him.

Meanwhile, of course, White Tail and Young Black Buck were running like the wind, anxious to get as far away from their pursuers as they could. They didn't know

what had happened at Black Ravine, and they couldn't stop to investigate. The fear that the wolves and Mountain Lions might still be on their trail kept them going until they were nearly exhausted.

One mile, two miles, three miles they ran without stopping or looking around, fear lending speed to their legs. Then something happened which brought them to a sudden halt. Young Black Buck stumbled, and plunged headfirst to the ground. When he tried to get up again, he groaned with pain, and held a fore-leg in the air as if it hurt him.

"Oh, I've broken my leg!" he cried. "I can't run another step. They'll catch me now, I know! I can't escape them!"

White Tail, whose momentum had carried him some distance ahead, stopped and turned around.

"Let me see it," he said, sniffing at the leg. After quickly examining it, he added; "No, it isn't broken—only sprained. Can't you stand on it?"

"No, not for an instant. Oh, what will become of me! Hark! Isn't that Puma growling?"

"No," replied White Tail, listening with his head flung back and his nose in the air.

"Then it's Timber calling, I'm sure it is."

White Tail listened again. He was trembling himself, for the fright and exhausting run had made him very nervous.

"It's something, but I don't think it's Timber Wolf. He hasn't had time to run around the end of Black Ravine."

"But he'll be here soon," whined Young Black Buck.

"Then we must be going. We can't stay here. You must run on three legs. You can do it."

"Not so fast as Timber Wolf or Puma can run on four legs. Oh, you won't leave me, White Tail, will you? I shall die of fear if you do. I've always been your friend."

"I won't leave you yet," replied White Tail. "Lie down in the bushes, and I will run back and see if I can find Timber or Puma. If they're coming—"

"Don't leave me," interrupted Young Black Buck.

Just then, when White Tail was uncertain what to do, and so nervous that he couldn't stand still, Downy the Woodpecker appeared. He fluttered in a tree just as if he had been there waiting for them all the time.

"Oh, Downy," cried White Tail, "where are they? Are they on our trail yet? Did they get across Black Ravine?"

Downy finished hauling a grub out of its hole in the tree bark before he answered. "No," he then said, "they didn't get across Black Ravine, but Puma got in it. And he's there now, screaming with rage."

"He jumped and fell in it?" asked Young Black Buck.

"Yes," nodded Downy. "He tried to show Timber's family what he could do, and he made a pretty sight of himself. He missed the opposite side by a few inches, and if it hadn't been for a small tree growing on the rocks he would have fallen to the bottom, and been killed."

"I wish he had," said Young Black Buck.

"Well, he wasn't," added Downy, "so it's no good wishing for what didn't happen. He'll roll down, and get on his feet again. It's pretty hard to kill Puma."

"What did Timber and his pack do?" asked White Tail.

"They did just what you might expect of them. They jeered and laughed at Puma, and then Mrs. Puma interfered."

"I thought that Timber and Puma were friends," said White Tail.

"Such selfish friendship as they had for each other doesn't amount to much. It only takes a little for them to fall out and begin

fighting each other. And that's just what happened. Timber thought it was a good time to attack Mrs. Puma, and his whole pack jumped at her."

"And what happened then?" breathlessly asked White Tail.

"Mrs. Puma jumped too, and as she could jump faster and farther than Timber she got away and ran up a tree. There I left her, with the wolves howling underneath."

"I think then they'll give up the chase," remarked White Tail. "It's very fortunate for us, for Young Black Buck has sprained his leg, and will have to limp the rest of the way."

"I can't limp far on three legs," whined Young Black Buck. "And we are far away from the herd, aren't we, Downy?"

"Yes, so many miles I can't count them. You've been running away from where you started, and it will take you a long, long time to get home."

White Tail and Young Black Buck were greatly distressed by this information, for night was coming on, and to be caught after dark away from the herd in the heart of a strange woods was a most unpleasant outlook. White Tail might have made it by hard running, but Young Black Buck could never do

it, and White Tail wasn't going to leave him alone in the woods. He was too loyal for that.

"There doesn't seem to be any choice in the matter," White Tail said. "We've got to stay here, and make the best of it."

"But you could get home alone, White Tail, if you started right away," suggested Downy. "It will be moonlight early in the evening, and you can find your way once you reach the shallow stream."

"Yes, I know the way, but I couldn't leave Young Black Buck behind. No, I couldn't think of it. We'll find a resting place among the bushes, and stay here until morning. Then maybe his leg will be better."

Downy nodded his head, and began pecking away at the bark of the tree for another grub. Young Black Buck looked thankfully at the speaker, but said nothing.

"I'm afraid I'll have to leave you soon," Downy remarked after a while. "I'm a long distance from my home, and I don't see that I can help you any by staying."

"No," smiled White Tail, "except to give us warning of danger when it comes."

"There's no danger now unless—"

He stopped and listened attentively.

"Unless what, Downy?"

"I don't know that I should say it, for I don't want to frighten you, but there are man hunters in this woods. They've pitched a camp a few miles back of here. But if they haven't dogs with them they won't find you. Just keep quiet here in the bushes until morning."

"We certainly will," replied White Tail. "I dread the man hunters as much as Puma and Timber, especially if they have dogs."

And all through the night, he thought and dreamt of the man hunters, but nothing happened until morning, and then the distant baying of a dog startled him.

STORY X

White Tail's Magnanimous Act

White Tail could not mistake the sound of the dogs in the distance. Neither could Young Black Buck, who was instantly on his feet. The dread sound had more to do in curing the sprained foot than the night's rest, and he followed White Tail, trotting around and sniffing the air in every direction.

"Are they coming this way?" Young Black Buck asked.

"It's hard to tell," replied White Tail. "I haven't picked up their scent yet, but I don't need to. I hear them."

"We must be going before they find us."

"Is your lame leg strong enough?"

"Yes, it's all right again—a little lame, but not much. Which way shall we go?"

Unconsciously Young Black Buck had been depending upon White Tail ever since danger first threatened them, and this was a sure sign that he recognized qualities of leadership in

his rival that he did not possess. And White Tail had accepted it without giving it much thought.

"I think," he said finally, "they're off to the right where Downy said the white hunters had their camp. Then we should go to the left."

"But that will take us to the hunting grounds of Puma and Timber Wolf," protested Young Black Buck.

"Yes, I know, but we can swing around north of them before we reach their woods. At any rate we can't run right into danger."

White Tail took up the lead, and Young Black Buck followed. They stole away in the woods almost as silently as shadows. A well worn trail led into the darkest and thickest part of the forest, and as this kept going straight away from the man hunter's camp they stuck close to it.

"Maybe this is Puma's trail," Young Black Buck remarked after they had gone a considerable distance. "No deer have been this way."

"No, of course not. This isn't our woods, but Puma hasn't been here. I could smell him."

"Then Timber Wolf and his pack made it."

"No, it hasn't Timber's smell either."

White Tail had his nose close to the ground, and while he couldn't quite make out whose trail it was he felt confident that it wasn't that of either Puma or Timber.

Still it is always dangerous to follow an unknown trail. It's against the law of the herd for the leader to do so, and had White Tail known it he would have taken to the thick woods. But he thought he was doing right, for it was much easier to travel faster in this way.

He was jogging along cautiously when the trail became suddenly very strong and fresh. He stopped and flung up his head. That animal odor that had caught his nose, startled him.

But the sight which met his eyes startled him more than the strange odor. There standing directly in the broad trail, grinning at them, was Buster the Bear. What a shock it gave him! Buster seemed to tower up so big that he looked like a giant of a bear.

With a snort of fear, White Tail turned and sprang out of the trail, clearing a clump of bushes in a beautiful jump, and calling to Young Black Buck to follow. The latter didn't need this advice, for he was already out of the trail, running for dear life.

Now back in the broad trail, Buster, who had been nearly as much surprised as they, suddenly roared with glee, his fat sides shaking and wobbling. "Ho! Ho!" he laughed. "What a scare I gave them! And I didn't open my mouth. I wonder what they'd done if I'd roared like this."

He let out a roar that shook the leaves off the bushes, and made White Tail and Young Black Buck run harder than ever. To them it seemed as if that roar was trying to catch them, and they couldn't dodge its echo.

But, of course, Buster wasn't pursuing them. In the first place, he knew he couldn't overtake them, and in the second he wasn't particularly hungry and rarely killed deer or bucks. He was too kind-hearted for that. But he did enjoy a joke, and he thought it was a huge one to scare them half out of their wits.

White Tail and Young Black Buck ran without knowing which way they were going. In fact they might have run straight into the camp of the man hunters if they hadn't been stopped by the sudden baying of the dogs.

This time the dogs were so close that they couldn't expect to throw them off their scent. In fact, one of them saw White Tail's head, and immediately gave the signal. He rushed

for them with wild yelps of delight, and two others followed him.

The two bucks swung around in another direction, and ran pell-mell through the woods. The fear of the dogs made them forget Buster. Indeed White Tail realized his mistake now. He knew that Buster could not overtake him in a race, but the dogs of the man hunters might. They would follow them night and day until exhaustion killed one or the other.

"We're in for it now," White Tail said to his companion, breathing hard. "The dogs are fresh, and we're not. We must find a river to throw them off our scent."

But finding a river in a strange woods was not an easy thing to do. So far as they knew there was no river there. They were completely turned around, and hardly knew which direction to take to reach home.

Young Black Buck soon began to show signs of weariness, and his lame leg hurt him again. In vain White Tail urged him on, but he couldn't run any faster. The dogs would certainly soon overtake him.

Then White Tail did a magnanimous thing. He couldn't bear to leave his companion behind to be pulled down by the dogs, while he escaped. No, no, that would never do for

one who some day expected to be leader of the herd!

"Young Black Buck," he said, running along by the side of the panting creature, "you run straight on as hard as you can. I'm going to stop here until the dogs see me. Then I'll lead them off to the left. So long as they can see me they'll follow me and forget the scent. When I get them far enough away I'll run faster, and get away from them. You understand?"

Young Black Buck nodded his head. He was too tired to reply in words. "Then go on! I'll wait here until the dogs come up."

It was a risky thing to do, but White Tail felt that alone he could outrun the dogs. At any rate he was going to do that much for his companion.

He didn't have long to wait. The baying hounds soon appeared, and catching sight of White Tail they started for him with yelps of delight. White Tail sprang away in the bushes, but not so fast that the dogs lost sight of him. He noticed that all three were chasing him. Then, when some distance away from the fork in the trail, he increased his speed.

In a very short time he was out of sight again, but the hounds were on his scent. They

had lost Young Black Buck's, and there was no chance of their picking it up again.

Away on the wind White Tail flew. His tremendous strides carried him far in the lead. Mile after mile he covered, his proud head flung back, his nostrils distended. It was a killing pace, but the dogs held on behind. How long could he stand it? Another mile, and the pace began to tell on him. He was growing weary and exhausted. But the dogs were still coming!

When he began to fear he could not escape, it began to rain, falling gently at first, and then more heavily.

In the next story you will read of how the rain helped him.

STORY XI

White Tail's Adventure in the Camp

The rain made White Tail's difficulties worse, for the logs and stones were so slippery that he stumbled time and again, and to avoid a fall he had to slacken his pace. The dogs on the other hand, kept up their pace, as the slippery things did not seem to bother them, and they began to gain on the fleeing buck very rapidly. Their deep baying drew so near that White Tail became startled.

But all this time the rain was planning to help the buck, although he did not know it at the time. He was feeling very uncomfortable, as well as frightened. The steady downpour soaked him to the skin, and the driving wind splashed the rain-drops in his eyes, half blinding him.

When the dogs drew so near that White Tail felt they would soon see him, he turned abruptly around, and ran at right angles to his former course. He had not tried dodging before, but had kept on a straight course.

To his surprise he heard the barking of the dogs grow suddenly fainter, and then very confused. The fact was the heavy downpour of rain had nearly blotted out his trail, and the dogs could not readily pick it up again. So long as he kept on in straight course, the dogs had followed him.

But now, by dodging, White Tail found he could easily elude them, so faint was the scent he left behind. The rain washed that away, and completely baffled the dogs.

It was a great blessing, for White Tail was badly winded. He was so tired that as soon as he left the dogs far in the rear he sought shelter from the rain. He was almost exhausted with his efforts, and a bed of leaves or grass would be the greatest blessing in the world.

Directly ahead of him, he saw an old deserted open camp standing in a partial clearing. It was built of pine logs, with the bark left on, and a roof and three sides. The front was left open, with an old camp-fire place of stones and rocks a few feet away.

At first White Tail stopped and looked at the camp suspiciously. If the man hunters lived in it, he should avoid it as he would Puma or Timber, but if it were deserted there would be no harm in seeking shelter

under its roof. He watched, listened and sniffed for a long time before he dared approach it.

Then by degrees he walked closer until he had a chance to look inside. There was no one there, and it had not been inhabited for a long, long time. White Tail could tell this by the absence of any odor.

"I think it's safe," he muttered after another close examination. "I'll spend the night here. I'm dreadfully tired, and so wet I'm cold and shivery."

He walked under the sheltering roof, and found a bed of sweet-smelling spruce boughs in one corner. They were perfectly dry, and White Tail gave a grunt of satisfaction. It was a dry shelter, with a soft, dry bed already prepared for him. He dropped down on it with a sigh of intense relief.

It rained hard all night. White Tail could hear the floods of water pouring on the roof of his shelter, but under it the place was dry and warm. Darkness came early in the woods, and it was soon pitchy black.

He felt perfectly safe if none of the night prowlers appeared. The rain, however, was a protection to him, for even Puma and Timber rarely ventured forth in such a storm. They preferred to do their hunting on clear,

dry nights when the scent of their prey was clear and distinct.

"I don't think anybody will disturb me until morning," White Tail said, "and I can rest here in peace."

But of course you can never tell what may happen in the wildwoods. Suppose Puma or Timber Wolf should be caught away from home in the rain! If they were, and saw the open camp, they would very naturally seek it for shelter just as White Tail had done.

It was quite early in the evening when White Tail was awakened from slumber by a thump, thump outside. It came nearer and nearer. White Tail was so frightened that he could scarcely breathe. He trembled in every limb. Some animal was coming around the side of the open camp.

Before White Tail could leap to his feet to run, a head was thrust around the corner, and a pair of wonderful eyes looked at him. At the same instant the owner of them caught sight of White Tail's.

"Hello, Bumper!" White Tail exclaimed, when he recognized Bumper the White Rabbit. "Don't be afraid. I'm White Tail the Deer."

"Well, I'm mighty glad of that," replied Bumper, approaching. "You gave me an

awful start at first. I thought you were Mr. Fox or Sneaky the Wolf or Puma."

"And I thought you were Timber Wolf or the man hunters or their dogs."

"Seeing that we were both wrong then," said Bumper, "we might share this camp between us. You have no objection, I hope."

"No, I'm glad to have company. I'm dreadfully excited and alarmed."

Then he told the White Rabbit about his adventures, ending up with the pursuit by the dogs, and his escape to the deserted camp.

"You certainly did have a hard time of it," said Bumper when he had finished. "And you're a long way from home. I do hope you can get back without accident. What's that?"

Bumper stopped, and White Tail raised his head in alarm. There was a scream outside, and then a wild commotion in the bushes. The next moment something came rushing in the camp, and flopped down right at White Tail's feet.

It was Rusty the Blackbird. "Help! Help! Oh, help me!" Rusty cried. "Great Horn the Owl is after me! Here he comes now!"

And out of the darkness swept a shadowy figure that hardly made any noise; but the moment it saw White Tail it stopped and circled around his head. White Tail raised

his head, and swung his big antlers threateningly at Great Horn.

"Look out," he said, "or I'll hit you! Don't come any nearer, Great Horn!"

"Is that you, White Tail?" asked Great Horn. "I didn't know you were here. Well, I won't disturb you. I'm after Rusty there at your feet. Let me have him, and I will leave at once."

"You will leave at once without Rusty," replied White Tail. "He's a friend of mine, and I'm going to protect him."

"Hoot! Hoot!" shouted the Owl in laughter. "I'll take him whether you want me to or not."

He made a swift dive for poor Rusty, but White Tail's big antlers swung around and knocked him over. One prong hurt Great Horn so that he flew back to a safe place.

"If you come nearer, I'll hurt you worse the next time," warned White Tail.

Great Horn sat there and considered for some time, his great eyes blinking and winking. "What are you doing here, White Tail?" he asked finally. "Don't you know you're on Puma's hunting grounds? Well, if you don't know it you ought to. I think Puma might be interested in knowing it. Now give me Rusty at once or I'll fly away, and tell Puma."

This threat made Rusty tremble, and Bumper shiver in his corner where he was hiding under the boughs; but White Tail did neither. "Go, and tell him, Great Horn," he replied. "I won't give up Rusty. I'll protect my friends."

And Great Horn flew away. What he did will appear in the next story.

STORY XII

White Tail Escapes

The moment Great Horn the Owl flew out of the open camp to tell Puma of White Tail's hiding place, Bumper hopped from his place in the corner, and Rusty jumped to a perch on one of the buck's antlers.

"Oh, dear," began Rusty, "I've brought trouble upon you, White Tail! Great Horn will guide Puma here. I wish now I'd never flown in here."

"No, you don't wish that, Rusty," replied White Tail. "If you hadn't come here Great Horn would have killed you."

"And now Puma will kill you."

"Not if I can help it," smiled White Tail. "He's been on my trail before, and I shook him off."

Then he told Rusty of his adventures.

"You're wonderful, White Tail," the Blackbird said when he had finished. "You saved Young Black Buck's life, and nearly lost your

own. Now you've saved my life, and got yourself in more danger. I wish I could do something to help you in return."

"Probably you can, Rusty. Who knows? I'm terribly mixed up in these strange woods. I hardly know which way to go to find home. Perhaps you can direct me."

"Yes, I can do that easily."

"Thanks! That's one good turn you can do me. Now for another. Is there any river or stream near here that I can reach? If so I can go to it before Puma comes, and then wade down it to throw him off my scent."

"Why, yes, there's a shallow brook only a mile from here. I can take you to that."

"Which way shall I go — up or down the brook?"

"Go down it a couple of miles until it runs in the stream where Father Buck let the herd feed on the rushes this morning — the place you started from when you ran the race with Young Black Buck."

"In that case," replied White Tail, "I think I'll be going right away. I'm anxious to be off."

"But it's a dreadful night outside. Hear it rain."

"Yes, but it would be more dreadful to stay here until Great Horn and Puma appeared.

Puma would kill me, and Great Horn would pounce upon you."

"Yes, of course, we must go — right away, rain or no rain."

Bumper, who had been listening to the conversation, hopped to the entrance, and then came back. "If I'm any judge," he said, "I don't think you'll have such a wet trip. That shower was the last. The clouds are breaking away, and the moon will soon be out."

White Tail was instantly on his feet, and beat Rusty to the front where the two of them gazed up at the rain clouds now growing thin and ragged in places. They saw a star twinkle in the east, and then another and another. The storm was, indeed, over, and the night trip through the woods would not be so disagreeable.

"I must be off at once, Rusty," White Tail said. "Puma may be back any minute."

"You can't start any too soon to suit me, White Tail, for if Puma comes Great Horn will be with him. Come on! I'm ready."

"It seems to me," remarked Bumper, "you don't consider me at all. I'm not even invited to go with you."

"We thought you'd prefer to stay in this dry camp," replied White Tail. "It's very com-

fortable here, and you can hide under the spruce boughs."

The White Rabbit sniffed. "How long do you suppose it would take Puma to find me?" he asked. "When he found you'd gone, he'd eat me up instead. A rabbit makes only a mouthful for Puma, but it's better than nothing. No, I'm going with you."

So the three started forth, leaving the shelter of the camp for the wet trail of the woods. And how wet everything was! The trail was soaked with water, and every leaf and bough was dripping with moisture. Every bush they touched threw a shower of rain-drops all over them.

Rusty led the way, hopping and flying from bush to bush, with Bumper following next, and White Tail bringing up the rear. Bumper was as familiar with the woods as Rusty, and White Tail really followed him, although at times the White Rabbit took short cuts through narrow paths which the buck could not tread.

It was very quiet and solemn in the woods. After the rain the stillness seemed intensified by the occasional splatter of water, as some overladened tree branch dipped its load and let it fall to the ground. No birds or animals

were abroad, and they made half the distance without accident or alarm.

Then back of them came a fearful roar that startled the echoes of the wildwoods. It was Puma the Mountain Lion.

"He's found we've escaped!" cried Rusty. "Oh, do hurry! He'll pick up your trail, and Great Horn will find me. Hurry! Hurry!"

"Wait a minute!" exclaimed White Tail. "Can't you find a hiding place, Rusty?"

"Yes, many of them, but I must show you the way to the shallow brook."

"No, you tell me how to find it," interrupted White Tail. "I can run much faster alone."

"It's straight ahead, White Tail."

"Then find a hiding place in the bushes. Good-bye, and thank you!"

"Are you going to leave me, White Tail?" asked Bumper.

"Yes, Bumper, for you travel too slow for me. You must find a burrow, and run for it. There must be one around here."

"Yes, there's a good one not far from here. But don't you need me?"

"No, Bumper, I can outrun you, and if you come along Puma may overtake me. Good-bye, and thank you! I'm off now."

Bumper waited until White Tail was out of sight and hearing. Then he sought a safe

burrow, and stood at the entrance to watch and listen. Pretty soon he heard a crash in the bushes, as Puma came dashing along. Close behind him was Great Horn the Owl, flitting from tree to tree.

"I wonder where Rusty is," Great Horn was saying. "I don't see him anywhere."

"Neither do I see White Tail," roared back Puma, "but I smell him. I'm on the right trail."

"I wish I could smell Rusty. My eyes are good, but my nose isn't as sharp as yours, Puma."

"I don't care where Rusty is," was the reply. "I want White Tail, and I'm going to catch him this time. He can't escape as he did before."

They swept past Bumper, and made their way down the trail. The White Rabbit sighed, and said: "I do hope White Tail will escape."

And White Tail hoped so too. Meanwhile, he was running with all his might. As soon as he had left his two friends, he leaped through the bushes or over them, with his head aimed straight for the brook. He heard the roar of Puma behind him, and this spurred him on to greater speed.

When he finally reached the shallow brook, he waded in and rapidly followed it down toward its mouth where it joined the wider stream. When Puma reached the brook he was baffled. The scent he had been following suddenly stopped.

"Which way has he gone?" he growled. "Up or down? I'll go up, Great Horn, and you go down. If you see him hoot to me, and I'll come."

Puma crossed the stream and ran up it on the opposite side, and Great Horn flitted down it. Of course, Great Horn found White Tail, but what happened then will appear next.

STORY XIII

White Tail Hears Unpleasant News

Great Horn found White Tail a long way down the stream, but by that time morning was dawning, and the light began to hurt the Owl's eyes. He caught a glimpse of something moving through the bushes, and flew toward it, for he could not in the early light see very far.

"Ah! I've found you, White Tail!" he cried. "I knew it was you."

"How did you know it, Great Horn?" asked White Tail. "I know you can't see very well in this light. I don't believe you can see me yet. You only hear me."

"The idea!" snapped Great Horn. "I can see you as well as you can see me."

"I don't believe it," replied White Tail. "Can you see Rusty sitting on the end of my antlers?"

"Rusty! Rusty! Is he there?" exclaimed Great Horn excitedly. Now the thought of

being so near to his prey made him very hungry, and he flew straight at White Tail's head. This was what the buck wanted, and when the Owl was close enough he swung his antlers around swiftly and caught Great Horn on the end. The blow was enough to knock the breath out of the bird, and he fell with a plump in the bushes.

"That's for betraying me to Puma," White Tail said. "Now call to him when you can get back your breath. I'm off."

And through the bushes he ran, leaving Great Horn so surprised and stunned that he couldn't call to Puma for a long time. White Tail had made good his escape.

A few yards through the woods he came upon the other stream, the broad river which he knew so well. He crossed this, and made his way up the other embankment. Then, with the woods before him familiar to his eyes and nose, he ran rapidly toward home. He had made his way out of Puma's hunting and through the higher timberland to his home.

His appearance was hailed with delight by all his friends. "Oh, White Tail, we thought you were dead!" exclaimed one.

"Dead! Huh! Why should you think that?" he sniffed.

"Young Black Buck said you were. He left you, and he was sure the dogs would catch you. He was sorry for you, but you couldn't keep up with him, and he didn't want to die because you couldn't run as fast as he."

"What!" exclaimed White Tail. "Has Young Black Buck returned? And did he tell such a tale?"

"Why, yes, that's what he said."

With a roar of rage at this falsehood, White Tail pushed his way into the middle of the herd, and stood face to face before Young Black Buck.

"You have been spreading more false stories about me, Young Black Buck!" he said. "After the way I saved you from the dogs, you lie about me!"

Young Black Buck stood all atremble at the sight of White Tail. He had truly believed that the dogs would catch him, and he thought there would be no harm in telling a story of his escape that would hurt White Tail and help himself.

"Listen!" White Tail added, swinging around and facing the herd. "Listen to a story of treachery. Young Black Buck has lied to you, and you must hear me. When he stumbled and sprained his leg, I stayed with him until it healed. Then when the man

hunters started the dogs on our trail, we ran together until Young Black Buck's weak leg crippled him again. The dogs would have caught him, but I waited for them, and when they saw me I led them off on my trail. Young Black Buck escaped while I led the dogs a merry chase. I saved his life, and he rewards me for it by lies — nothing but lies!"

The commotion that followed these words was great, and the herd gazed from one speaker to the other.

"I challenge you to deny it!" continued White Tail, facing Young Black Buck. "See he cannot deny it! He knows it to be the truth!"

Young Black Buck, indeed, looked guilty. His limbs were trembling, and his head drooping. For once he had no ready story to explain his lies.

"To punish you for it, Young Black Buck, I challenge you to a fight!" went on White Tail, now so enraged that he wanted to punish his rival.

It was then that Black Buck interfered.

"Cease your quarreling over such petty things," he said. "There are greater things for the herd to consider than this."

"What can be greater than a question of honor?" interrupted White Tail boldly.

"Your son has spread falsehoods about me, and I challenge him to prove it by fighting."

"And I tell you to cease your quarreling," added Black Buck. "You may need your strength for a different kind of challenge. Know you not what has happened?"

White Tail looked mystified. Suddenly it occurred to him that he hadn't seen Father Buck or Mother Deer. They hadn't come forth to greet him. Had anything serious happened to them?

"No, I don't know what has happened," White Tail admitted. "I have been away, and know nothing."

"Then listen!" replied Black Buck. "Our leader has failed. He stumbled in the chase, and missed his footing. When we crossed the brook he failed to clear it. He is no longer our leader. He's old and broken. Tomorrow we meet at the Council Tree to choose a new leader."

White Tail stood dumbfounded. Father Buck had been disgraced! He had fallen and missed his footing! He had failed to cross the brook in a single jump! He was to be deposed as leader!

It seemed incredible, and White Tail was on the point of saying so when he remembered the words of Father Buck, and his prediction

that some day he would fail through old age and weakness. The thing had happened then in his absence. White Tail was glad of that, for it would have been hard for him to witness the leader's downfall.

Without another word to Black Buck, he whirled around to hunt up Father Buck and Mother Deer. He wanted the truth from their lips, and not from one who found pleasure in it. The sneer in Black Buck's words angered him.

He found the two quietly resting under a tree back of the herd, a little to one side as if they had already been cast out and ignored by those who had so recently looked up to them. Mother Deer rose and ran to greet her son.

"It is well, White Tail, that you've come back at this time," she said quietly. "You have heard the news?"

"Yes, I've heard it. It is true then — that — that —"

"Yes, my son," interrupted Father Buck, "I have led my last chase. Never again will the herd follow me. What must come to all of us at some time has befallen me. There is nothing to regret. One and all must face it sooner or later. Why should we not accept it complacently?"

White Tail was surprised, and yet pleased, by the quiet acceptance Father Buck took of his downfall. It softened the load that he was carrying in his own heart.

"I prepared you for it, you remember White Tail," the old leader continued. "Well, tomorrow they will choose a new leader. They will demand that I step aside. But until then I'm leader, and no one shall dispute that right."

He rose and shook his huge antlered head, looking for all the world like a leader, and when he bellowed an order every one started. He was not yet deposed. In the next story what happened at the Council Tree will be told.

STORY XIV

Choosing A New Leader

The call for a meeting at the Council Tree was issued to the herd by Father Buck himself. It was his duty to do this, for the law of the herd is that a leader is still in command, and his word must be obeyed, until he has been deposed and another chosen.

White Tail had been twice at the Council Tree before, but never on such a momentous occasion as this. His own initiation into the secrets of the council was nothing compared to the choosing of a new leader. He felt the weight of responsibility that was laid upon him, for the time had come for him to succeed his father or fail forever.

The choosing of a leader did not happen often. Once in a life time was the average. Unless something happened to a leader to cut him down accidentally in the prime of his life, or Puma or Timber pulled him down in the chase, no successor was chosen until he grew too weak and decrepit to lead. The event was, therefore, an important one, and long to

be remembered by those who took part in it.

Father Buck had led the herd for so many seasons that none but the older ones could remember when he was not their leader. In all those days and seasons he had been shrewd, wise and courageous so that few accidents had happened to any of the deer. His had been the most successful leadership that any could recall.

When they assembled at the Council Tree, Father Buck was there ahead of them, standing lonely and aloof in the place of honor under the big tree. His lordly head, with its great spread of antlers, was held high, so that some of those who had come to scoff and laugh at him felt a sudden awe. There was none of the meekness and humility of a fallen leader in his attitude.

Black Buck and the other older bucks, who had long years before contended with Father Buck for leadership, were impressed by his looks, and they took their places in the semicircle in uneasy silence. Suppose Father Buck should challenge again for leadership despite his failure of the previous day! Could any of them win in a mighty battle with him? They, too, were growing old, and their limbs and eyes were not as strong and sure as when they were young.

"You know the law of the herd, and of my people," Father Buck announced when all the deer were there. "Yesterday I failed you. It was the first time since I became your leader. Now the call is for a new leader unless I challenge for it again, and win it by my might."

He swung his antlered head around at the half circle of older bucks. There was a menace and challenge in the beautiful eyes.

"We want a new leader!" bellowed Black Buck angrily. "You can't lead us again, Father Buck! You have failed in the chase. Twice you failed within a day. A new leader is what we demand!"

There was a chorus of approvals, and Black Buck gained courage by the backing his words received, but Father Buck cut him off short.

"Be silent!" he said. "I am still leader, and my word is law! If I choose to challenge again, the right is mine. It is the law of the herd. Who speaks otherwise?"

There was no disputing this. The law of the herd was very simple, and it had to be obeyed. Even Black Buck knew this, and if he chose Father Buck could challenge and prove his right to remain leader if he proved himself better than all others.

"If you challenge again," began Black Buck, "you must do battle with the young bucks as well as the others. That's the law isn't it?"

"It is!" replied Father Buck. "Young and old may meet the challenger. But I first issue my challenge to the older ones. That is my right. I may be old and weak, my eyes may be growing dim, and my legs less active and sure; but I am still leader, and I issue the first challenge. All you bucks more than three seasons old step forth! It is to you I issue this challenge. Come and accept it. I will fight for the leadership!"

An uneasy thrill swept the multitude. Each turned to look the other in the eye. Who would accept Father Buck's challenge? Black Buck hesitated, measuring the sturdy limbs of the leader with his own, and comparing the thick-set neck and head of antlers with those of his immediate neighbors. There was not one qualified to enter the lists and hope to carry off the honors.

"I hear no one!" shouted Father Buck. "The challenge is not accepted. So be it! Then we come to the second challenge. Here, too, the law gives me the right to fight with the younger bucks for leadership. We have many of them — young, sturdy, bright-eyed

offsprings of ours who will some day win honors in the chase. They have eyes as keen as ours were at one time; limbs as straight and strong; minds as active and intelligent. We have taught them the ways of the woods, and they come to the Council Tree today to prove their rights."

He stopped and gazed around at the big assembly. His words and commanding figure had made even Father Buck's worst enemies respectful. The outcome of the meeting was still uncertain and wrapped in mystery.

"Therefore," the leader continued after a pause, "it is for them to decide the leadership. I have no wish to challenge them. I could not conquer them if I chose. It shall be as they decide. Who of the younger ones challenges for the high honor of leader to take my place?"

A thrill of excitement passed around, for the crucial moment had now arrived. Father Buck did not intend to fight to retain the leadership. There was an instant pause in which you could have heard a twig snap, and then Young Black Buck, with head held high, stepped to the center of the semi-circle. He trotted gracefully around several times, and then halted before Father Buck.

"I, Young Black Buck, son of Black Buck of Dismal Swamp, challenge for the leadership! I shall prove my right to it by the one test that is required by the law of the herd — a battle with all comers!"

"It is well, Young Black Buck!" replied Father Buck, looking at the haughty eyes of the challenger. "You have been the first to challenge. Is there any other?"

The aged leader turned his head just a little so that his eyes could rest upon White Tail, but it did not need this look to inspire his son. White Tail had already started forward, and with no less pride and dignity than Young Black Buck he trotted into the center of the clearing.

"I, White Tail, son of your great leader and of Mother Deer, accept the challenge. As I have proved greater than Young Black Buck in the chase, in the long jump, and in other ways, I shall prove to you in combat that I am better fitted to lead the herd than he."

The excitement reached a climax when White Tail had finished his challenge, but Father Buck raised his head again to speak.

"Who next challenges! The law of the herd permits any one under three seasons. Who speaks?"

There was no answer, and no one stepped forward. The aged leader cast his eyes slowly around the crowd to make sure he had missed none, and then returned to the two challengers.

"So be it!" he said. "The leadership shall be settled between these two — White Tail and Young Black Buck. The herd must accept the victor as their leader."

In the next story will come the combat.

STORY XV

The Great Combat

Now the law of the herd says that the challengers for leadership shall fight until one or the other is victor. If it takes hours or days or weeks it must continue until one is beaten and can no longer fight. The rules are simple. He must prove himself the victor by strength, cunning, intelligence, trickery or any other way. The leader must be supreme so that none again dare challenge his authority.

It is always a battle royal in the woods. It never ends in a draw, except in those few sad but rare cases when horns and antlers get interlocked, and neither can pull away until both starve. Then a new challenge must be issued, and another leader chosen. Of this, both White Tail and Young Black Buck knew, and above all they sought to keep their horns and antlers from becoming interlocked. It availed the victor little to conquer if he starved with the vanquished.

When they sprang toward each other with lowered heads, they kept a wary eye out for the other's twisted antlers. It was a light charge at first, a mere test of skill and strength; but their heads came together with a shock that sounded throughout the woods.

Then they withdrew, and trotted around each other, waiting for a favorable opening. Both knew that one blow against the side or limbs of the other would cripple his antagonist so the fight would be short. After circling White Tail three times, Young Black Buck launched his head straight for the flanks of his enemy, and for a moment it looked as if he would gain a great advantage; but at the critical instant White Tail turned and met the charge head-on. The clash of antlers was terrific but neither went down.

Next they butted in short, sharp swings of the head, slashing, cutting and pounding with all their might. It was like a close-in sparring match between two skilled boxers, each waiting for an opening to deliver a fatal blow. But both were as swift in defense as in offense.

They withdrew from the conflict, and trotted around each other once more. This time White Tail led the attack. Rearing on his hind legs, he brought all the weight of his body in a downward blow that made Young

Black Buck shake and tremble. For a moment neither could recover from the terrible shock, so swift and powerful had the blow been. A thrill of excitement went through the assembled herd.

"Well done!" exclaimed Father Buck.

"But not better than my son can do!" echoed Black Buck.

To prove the truth of his father's words, Young Black Buck turned a complete circle, suddenly reared, and brought his head down in another terrific blow. White Tail received it, and for a time their horns and antlers became locked. They pulled and jerked, pushed and twisted all over the open space to free their heads. With a sudden snap, the antlers loosened, and they were free once more.

The battle grew more vigorous now that the two combatants were warmed to the fray. They began to put more speed in their motions, and more force in their blows. Confident that neither one could take advantage of the other, they fell back to hard hitting. In this strength counted, and it was soon seen that they were pretty evenly matched. Again and again they received and administered punishment.

It may have seemed cruel to one not acquainted with the laws of the wild deer, but not so to the spectators nor to the fighters. The leadership had to be decided in this manner, and either combatant had the right to stop it by yielding to the other. But neither White Tail nor Young Black Buck had any intention of doing this.

The blood of the older ones was warmed by the sight. Father Buck recalled the day when he fought Black Buck for leadership, and he was proud of his son now fighting over again his own battles. Even Mother Deer, tenderhearted as she was, admired and applauded White Tail. She knew the battle once decided in his favor would never have to be repeated.

White Tail suddenly delivered a crushing blow upon his enemy's head that brought him to his knees. For an instant every one held his breath, but before White Tail could take advantage of it with another blow he slipped and nearly fell to his own knees. Young Black Buck was up in an instant, and made a wild rush for his adversary. White Tail was prepared, and received it steadily.

The combat continued for an hour, two hours, three hours, until the flanks of both were covered with foam. And still they butted and bucked, and fought with all their

might! Their breath was coming in short gasps, and their eyes flashing defiance.

All that morning the fight continued, with slight intervals for rest. Then they returned to it, each more determined than ever to defeat his rival. Young Black Buck soon showed signs of weakening, and his father noticing it, called out:

"Let them rest until another day! They have done enough today!"

"No! no!" shouted a dozen voices.

"The combat must go on!" replied Father Buck. "Not until they both ask for a rest can it stop."

It was renewed with greater vigor. Growing weak by the strain, they fell more often to their knees. The crashing of horns in mighty blows could no longer be resisted so easily. They were longer in recovering from the blows, and slower in getting to their feet.

"Shall we put it off until another day?" asked Young Black Buck suddenly to his rival.

"No, it shall be settled today," replied White Tail, breathing hard. "I can fight for weeks yet. I remember your lies about me, Young Black Buck. I recall your treachery in the woods! I think of how you lost me in Dismal Swamp so I might be disgraced! And

now you shall be punished for them! I shall fight you until you can't get up again!"

"That will never happen, White Tail! You can never do that!"

But this boast was hard to make good. Young Black Buck was showing weariness. Again and again he stumbled and fell to his knees. And each time White Tail sprang at him and delivered a series of mighty blows with his head.

Once Young Black Buck failed to get quickly back to his feet, and White Tail rushed him. With all the speed and power he could summon he delivered a crushing blow, and knocked his rival down until all four legs were doubled up under him.

White Tail stood over him. "Call me leader!" he snorted.

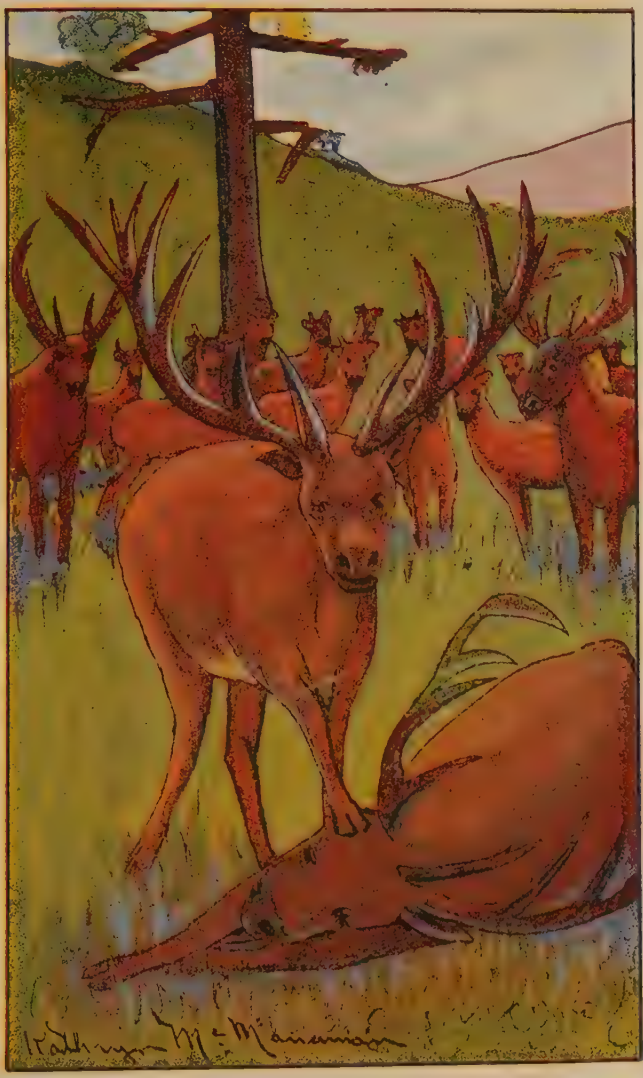
"Never!" grunted Young Black Buck, and tried to rise. White Tail knocked him flat again before he could rise.

"Call me leader!" he challenged again.

"Never!" came a fainter cry.

Again White Tail flattened him out, and issued the challenge the third time, and once more Black Buck refused.

Four times White Tail flattened him on the ground, and the fifth time Young Black Buck could not rise.



"Call me leader!"

There was no response. Young Black Buck was too weak to answer. White Tail stood over him. Three times Young Black Buck tried to rise, but fell back. He was too weak to respond to the challenge or to get to his feet. The battle was over! White Tail was victor!

"Who challenges my leadership now!" White Tail bellowed, glaring around. And none replied! Their very silence made him their choice. In the next story White Tail succeeds his father and becomes leader of the herd.

STORY XVI

White Tail Made Leader of the Herd

By defeating Young Black Buck in combat, White Tail was, according to the law of the herd, chosen leader until another should grow up and displace him. The decision on the battlefield could not be changed or altered. Even Black Buck and his son recognized this, and without protest they permitted Father Buck to complete the ceremony.

"The law of the herd has been vindicated," he said, after White Tail had trotted around the vast circle, and challenged in vain any other antagonist. "White Tail shall henceforth be your leader. To him obedience shall be given, and any who refuses shall be driven into exile. If there is any opposition it must be stated now."

Black Buck's wicked eyes flashed angrily. He was doubly disappointed that his son had failed, for his own defeat years before came back to torment him. Young Black Buck was

too exhausted to speak, and if there was any protest it had to come from his father.

"Young Black Buck have you anything to say?" continued Father Buck, turning to the defeated.

Young Black Buck shook his head wearily. There was no fight left in him.

"You promise to obey the new leader?"

Again the weary shaking of the head, followed by a sign as the vanquished dropped down and closed his eyes.

"And you, Black Buck of Dismal Swamp?"

"I will follow and obey the leader, as I followed and obeyed you, Father Buck," was the answer. "There is nothing else for me to do. I submit to the law."

Father Buck turned to White Tail, whose distended nostrils and flashing eyes indicated that he was still ready to fight for his honor. The eyes of father and son met an instant in an exchange of pride and happiness.

"It is well then," continued the ex-leader. "White Tail shall henceforth be the head of the herd. I go back to my place among the older bucks to follow."

A certain wistfulness crept into his voice and eyes. It was hard to yield the proud position, to hand over the burdens and glory of leader to another. None could do it without

a certain amount of regret — not even though the successor was his own son.

"I have led you many, many seasons," continued Father Buck, "and always with success. Puma and Timber have never raided the herd in my time. We have foiled and deceived them, finding new pasture fields where they could not come. We have been safe from Loup the Lynx and Sneaky the Gray Wolf. I have fought them both, holding them at bay with my mighty horns, and once I remember it was a hard fought, desperate battle with Sneaky. But before he could call his pack the herd had escaped, and I fled from him on the wind."

He paused a moment, swinging his head proudly from side to side. "And our pasture fields have always been rich and sufficient," he continued. "I have led you where the food was plentiful even in the depths of the winter. In snow and rain we have fared well. Our fawns and does have been safe. Not one has been lost through bad leadership. We have multiplied and grown strong. Today we stand first among the great herds of the timberland. May we continue to grow and thrive under our new leader."

With his farewell address finished, Father Buck stepped from under the Council Tree,

and White Tail, knowing that he was expected to assume control, trotted up to take his place. Some noticed that, as he passed Father Buck, he was taller and stronger in limb than the ex-leader. The tips of his antlers towered a full foot higher than those of Father Buck. Even his enemies noticed this, and were satisfied that he would prove a good leader.

"Father Buck has spoken well," White Tail began, as he glanced proudly around at the herd. "His leadership has been successful, and I shall make it more so. If I fail you, may I fall in the chase and break my neck! If I show weakness or cowardice, may Puma or Timber Wolf pull me down and eat out my heart! If I show lack of wisdom and justice, may Loup the Lynx or Sneaky trip me, and devour me. I shall be your leader, and next to me —"

He stopped and glanced from one to another. He had the right to choose the one next to him in power, one who would lead the herd if he were sick or away.

"— and the next to me in authority," he added, "comes Young Black Buck. I have no ill will for him. The past must be forgotten. All I ask from him is loyalty and support. The safety of the herd must always be his first thought. He must give his life, if necessary,

to protect the does and fawns in my absence. Do you promise this, Young Black Buck?"

Surprised by this honor thrust so unexpectedly upon him, Young Black Buck opened his weary eyes, and jumped to his feet. He trotted into the circle, and once more held his head high.

"White Tail," he began in a trembling voice, "I don't deserve this, but if you ask it I shall accept. I pledge loyalty and friendship. I shall make it the law of my life to support your leadership and to do all I can for the herd. Is that enough?"

"It is all we can ask, Young Black Buck," answered White Tail. "Now, under the Council Tree, we pledge ourselves to the service of the herd and to each other's support. Let it be understood that when I am away, Young Black Buck shall be in command, and it is the duty of every one to follow and obey him. It is so agreed! The Council is now finished."

The meeting immediately broke up, and the deer and bucks mingled together to congratulate the new leaders, for the council had ended happily, and there was no bitter feeling carried away. The older ones related to the young ones stories of other similar meetings

under the Council Tree, and the latter listened eagerly to these tales.

Father Buck and Mother Deer withdrew silently, leaving White Tail in command, with the whole herd crowding around him to flatter and congratulate. There was a new spring in the ex-leader's steps as he trotted away, and Mother Deer, walking along by his side, noticed it.

"You do not act like a fallen leader," she said, smiling. "I haven't seen you walk so lightly and happily for a long time."

"A fallen leader is not always to be pitied, my dear," Father Buck replied. "The greatest thing he can do is to lead his people successfully, and the next greatest thing is to rear a son to take his place. Have I not done both?"

Mother Deer nodded and smiled. Father Buck turned to her and affectionately licked her neck. "And the greatest thing you could do," he added, " is to train your son so that he is worthy to lead. I'm proud of White Tail, and still prouder of you, Mother Deer. He is your son!"

A little later White Tail found them together in the woods, talking and smiling, and so happy in the possession of each other's love that neither seemed to regret the loss of author-

ity. And White Tail, watching them, said to himself:

"The honor of being leader of the herd is not all mine. I owe much of it to them. They have trained me and taught me, and suffered for me, that I might succeed. I shall never forget that."

And to the end of his days, which were many, White Tail never forgot that to have good parents was greater even than to be leader of the herd.

The next story in the Twilight Series is entitled: Washer the Raccoon.

JACKIE AND PEETIE BOW WOW

"Come on, Jackie!" called Peetie Bow Wow, the boy doggie, one morning. "Come on!"

"Where are you going?" asked Jackie of Peetie.

"Let's run off and join the circus," suggested Peetie, as he tried to stand up on the end of his tail and turn a somersault. "We can earn a lot of money."

"How?" asked Jackie, scratching his nose with his ear.

"Why, we can make money by doing tricks in the circus," went on Peetie. "We can jump over the backs of elephants, climb up to the top of the tent, and do lots of things like that. A circus is fun!"

You have read how Daddy Blake took Hal and Mab to the circus, and you will like to read about Jackie and Peetie. They are in a book called "Bedtime Stories: Jackie and Peetie Bow Wow," by Howard R. Garis, who also wrote the Daddy books.

Send to R. F. Fenno & Company, 18 East 17th Street, New York City, and they will mail the book on receipt of price, if you can not get it in your book store. The book has colored pictures.

UNCLE WIGGILY'S FORTUNE

"Oh, dear!" cried Uncle Wiggily Longears, the rabbit gentleman, as he got to the top of a big hill and looked down. "Oh, dear!"

"Why, what has happened?" asked Sammie Littletail, the boy rabbit, hopping up.

"Why, I have traveled all over, just as Dr. Possum told me to," replied Uncle Wiggily, "and I have not yet found my fortune. It is very sad!"

"Sad!" cried Sammie. "Not a bit of it! I know where your fortune is. You are the richest rabbit in the whole world!"

"My goodness me, sakes alive, and some ice cream radishes!" Uncle Wiggily exclaimed.

And then Sammie showed the rabbit gentleman his fortune. You may read all about how he found it in the book entitled "Bedtime Stories: Uncle Wiggily's Fortune." And you should see the colored pictures Mr. Wisa made for it!

Howard R. Garis, who wrote the Daddy books, wrote this one about Uncle Wiggily. R. F. Fenno & Company, of 18 East 17th Street, New York City, publish it. They will send it to you if your own store does not have it. Write and ask them.

UNCLE WIGGILY'S ADVENTURES

"Ouch! Oh, my goodness me, sakes alive, and a basket of soap-bubbles!" cried Uncle Wiggily Longears, the rabbit gentleman, as he hopped along the grass one day.

"Why, whatever is the trouble?" asked Nurse Jane Fuzzy Wuzzy, the muskrat lady, who kept house for Uncle Wiggily. "What happened?"

"Oh, my rheumatism hurts me very much," answered the rabbit gentleman, as he limped along on his red, white and blue striped barber-pole crutch. "I wonder how I may be cured?"

"I can cure you!" cried Dr. Possum, who made powders and pills to cure sick animals.

You may read all about Uncle Wiggily, and of how Dr. Possum sent the old rabbit gentleman away on a funny journey, in the book called "Bedtime Stories: Uncle Wiggily's Adventures." It has eight lovely colored pictures in it.

Howard R. Garis, who wrote the Daddy book you have just read, also wrote about Uncle Wiggily. Try to get the stories about him from your book store. If you can not, send to the publishers, R. F. Fenno & Company, 18 East 17th Street, New York City, who will mail the book on receipt of price, and also a postcard.

DADDY TAKES US TO THE CIRCUS

"Oh, Mab!" cried Hal Blake, as he came running into the house one morning. "Daddy is going to take us to the circus!"

"Are you, Daddy?" asked the little girl.

"Yes," said Mr. Blake. "Here are the tickets."

"Oh, what fun we'll have!" shouted Hal.

"Won't we!" added his sister.

How Daddy Blake took the children to the show in the big tent, and how Hal and Mab went to sleep in one of the red wagons, and were carried off—all that you may read in the book called "Daddy Takes Us to the Circus." It is written by Howard R. Garis, who also wrote the Bedtime book you have just read. It contains fine pictures, and has a decorated cover. You read, and liked, the Bedtimes, so surely you will like the Daddy books.

If your dealer does not keep them, please send to the publishers, R. F. Fenno & Company, 18 East 17th Street, New York City, who will forward any volume on receipt of price.

Daddy Blake, on his trips with Hal and Mab, told them things about nature and outdoor life.

DADDY TAKES US SKATING

"Oh, look! Poor Roly-Poly has gone through the ice!" cried Mab Blake.

"Oh, Daddy can't we get him out?" begged her brother Hal.

"I'll try," said Mr. Blake, but it was too late. Roly-Poly, the little white poodle dog, disappeared. That means you could not see him any more. He was under the ice.

But, later on, Roly was found in a most wonderful way. You may read all about it in a book called "Daddy Takes Us Skating." Howard R. Garis, who wrote the Bedtime books, also wrote about Daddy, Hal and Mab. The books will charm little tots, and also be of value to them, for Mr. Blake instructed his children when he took them on outings—he told them about nature and the great outdoors—how to camp, fish, and so on.

If your book store does not have these volumes, you can get them from the publishers, R. F. Fenno & Company, 18 East 17th Street, New York, who will mail them on receipt of price. The books are well illustrated.